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THE GENEVA CONFERENCE

5 June 1959

The Geneva meeting seems to be in a crisis phase, i.e., in the stage at which its dominant character will soon be determined. Will it be just another East-West go-around, with nothing accomplished, or will the way open suddenly for progress on some issue?

From latest reports the West is apparently getting down to cases in secret sessions, but how far this will be carried is impossible to say.

A major fact about the conference as it completes its fourth week is the fact that there has not been any serious split in the Western ranks, a possibility that looked large when the conference began.

Pre-Conference Expectations:

Before the Geneva meeting opened, there was widespread scepticism that it would succeed in agreeing on anything substantial. Many people thought that at the most it would define the issues between East and West somewhat more clearly, and then pass the buck to the chiefs of government, meeting at the Summit.

Some people thought, however, that the foreign ministers could come to an interim agreement on Berlin; others held out the possibility that the conference would produce agreement to end nuclear tests, or to start a military thinning out in Europe.

Not to be overlooked are those who feared that the conference would end in such a bitter failure that a summit meeting would be regarded as impossible. We still cannot say definitely which of these various groups will turn out to have been most nearly correct.

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Reasons for the Conference:

It is perhaps instructive to recall some basic facts about the conference. That it is taking place at all is because Khrushchev last November served notice on the West that he wanted a radical adjustment of the situation in Berlin, and that he would carry through that part of his plan which could implement by himself, even if the West didn't agree. And he would do this by 27 May. Except for disregarding his own deadline, Khrushchev still stands by his proposals.

The West might have ignored Khrushchev's threats, except that the Western governments felt their people would not approve this course, particularly since it involved a danger of war.

Here we might note that considerations of public opinion have played a tremendous role in the thinking and planning of the West ever since the crisis began. Decisions have been made on the basis of presumed opinions held by the public and in some cases it is doubtful that these opinions actually existed.

The West might have entered into talks simply on Berlin. However, it felt that this was too sterile a course, since it did not afford enough diplomatic elbow-room. The Soviet proposals were so unacceptable, and the degree to which the West could offer to depart from the present Berlin arrangements was likely to be so small, that there would not be enough to discuss. The other possibility was that if the spotlight were focussed solely on the Berlin question, the West, feeling itself under pressure to adopt a conciliatory attitude, would be in greater danger of sacrificing the Western position.

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It would be better, the West thought, to divert some attention, including Soviet attention, away from Berlin and onto other, though related, subjects. It was natural and logical to enlarge the topic of debate, since obviously there wouldn't be a Berlin problem if there were not a general German problem. Khrushchev went along with this expansion of reference to Germany as a whole when he proposed a draft peace treaty with the two Germanies.

To complicate matters, for some years the topic of Germany and German unification has been linked with that of European security, which originally and most commonly has meant steps that could be taken to assure the Soviets that they will not be attacked by a united Germany.

And European security measures are only a token of what might be done for the security of all countries through disarmament.

Hence, starting from Berlin, all of these topics have been added into the pot for the foreign ministers to deal with.

Western Objectives:

It is possible to interpret Western objectives in respect to the whole situation growing out of Berlin, in this way:

1. To make an acceptable agreement on a united Berlin, German unification, and European security if the Soviets should unexpectedly and miraculously be disposed this way;
2. If this is not possible, then to reach an agreement on Berlin which would concede enough to satisfy Khrushchev now, but without, apparently, sacrificing the West's ability to remain in Berlin and maintain access.

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As it was put by the working group that devised our position, the West's objective is an agreement with the Soviet Union which would have the result of making the status quo liveable for a period of years. The Working Group advised the Western powers not to think in terms of concessions, but rather in terms of new positions from which they would derive advantage themselves. This, of course, is an echo of the British view that we might get a new contract regarding our presence in Berlin which, they contend, would give us a clearer title.

There has also been a Western hope, though no great store has been set by it, and that is to cause Khrushchev quietly and completely to abandon his plans for Berlin. Convince him of Western determination to stay in the city and maintain access to it. Throw him off stride by upsetting his six-months' deadline. Give him the opportunity, if he is looking for it, of burying his Berlin plans under a welter of intricate proposals on Germany and security.

To aid this effort, we would attempt to convince a decisive part of the world's non-Communist population that no basic change is feasible in Berlin until the four powers agree on a general German settlement, and then convince the Soviets that they would be wise to yield to the weight of world opinion.

Soviet Objectives:

A possible interpretation of Soviet objectives is this:

1. To get Western agreement to (a) a peace treaty to be concluded with the two Germanies, to (b) a new status for West Berlin which would involve the elimination or reduction of Western control of the

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city, (c) to a recognition of East German authority over the access routes to Berlin, and (d) to military agreements (e.g., on suspension of nuclear tests and on the creation of nuclear--free zones) on terms favorable to the USSR.

2. Failing success for this complete package, to get at least recognition of GDR authority over access.

Progress Report, Soviet Position:

The question is, how much is either side progressing toward the attainment of its objectives? Four weeks of conversations have not moved East or West away from its opening position on any of the principal topics under discussion.

Any impression that the Soviet delegation has been attending strictly to the problems before the conference should be immediately dispelled. A large part of the conference's time has been taken up with long-winded Soviet propaganda blasts, especially against West Germany and its alleged militaristic and revanchist policies, and with Western rebuttals to these attacks.

We cannot afford the luxury, or endure the tedium, however you look at it, of reviewing the propaganda side of the conference. But some setting up of the account on the side of substantive problems is necessary.

The West has not succeeded in shaking Gromyko off his demands for a peace treaty with the two Germanies, a proposal which makes scarcely any attempt to hide the fact that it is designed to preserve the split of Germany and bring about an acceptance of the status quo.

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Even while the conference has been in session, Khrushchev has been heard from afar, repeating the threat that if the West doesn't agree to the treaty, Moscow will make a separate peace with Penkow which will have the effect of depriving the West of any further right to be in Berlin. When a diplomat in Moscow asked Khrushchev what he would do if the West didn't choose to get out, he said, "That's my secret."

The Soviets have not altered their basic tune on the need to make a radical change in the status of West Berlin in the direction of weakening Western control, though they have offered to consider numerous variations of the original demilitarized city proposal.

As Gromyko has explained the alternatives, the West could simply withdraw, or it could bring the Soviets in to help run West Berlin, or Western forces could be replaced by neutral forces.

In respect to East German authority over access, Western recognition of this authority is referred to as an inevitability in Communist statements. The GDR is credited with having sovereignty over all transportation over its territory, but, as though there were differences in the amount of GDR sovereignty at different times, the Soviets say that this will be especially true after conclusion of a peace treaty.

Western acknowledgement of this authority is an integral part of the Communist free city plan for Berlin, and of the German peace treaty plan.

So far the Soviets have said very little about European security arrangements, disarmament, and such military subjects, unless one counts the repeated emphasis on the need to block the atomic arming of West German. Of course, the foreign ministers conference in the Soviet view was intended to concern itself only with Berlin and a peace treaty.

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At one session, Gromyko did reiterate the Soviet readiness to withdraw its armies from Germany, Poland, and Hungary, if the US, UK, French, and Canadian troops left West Germany, and if military bases in foreign territories were liquidated.

Some mention must be made here of at least one thing that is different since the conference began, and that is the position of the East Germans. Before the conference, the Soviets wanted them to be full participants in the meeting, whereas we were willing for them to be only advisers, who would presumably sit in the background and not speak out loud.

On the first day of the meeting, however, it was agreed that the East Germans, and the West Germans too of course, would sit at the famous rectangular tables and could talk when recognized. We have had some long speeches by Lothar Bolz, the GDR's foreign minister.

Whatever one might think of this arrangement, it has at least two consequences:

1. The world at large, and perhaps most importantly the so-called neutral countries who are sometimes close to recognizing the GDR, see Bolz and his aides sitting in the conference, in the presence of Herter, Courve, Lloyd, and Gromyko, and acting for all the world like he was the representative of a legitimate and consequential nation;

2. This point arrived at, it may be easier for the GDR to achieve the next step toward respectability and recognition.

The GDR is already claiming that it has been recognized de facto at the conference.

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Progress Report, Western Position:

Looking at the conference from the other point of view, the Soviets have so far not made any appreciable dent in the West's notions about German unification, or about the necessity of a link between progress on political matters and progress on military security measures.

Nor have the Soviets shaken the determination of the West to stay in Berlin.

We have, however, offered Moscow some adjustments in the Berlin situation. For example, we said this week that we were willing to hold the number of our troops in the city to a fixed level. Roughly expressed, this was a Working Group suggestion on measures which might be taken to reduce tensions in Berlin, in lieu of a change in status.

Actually, the Working Group's intention was that any fixed level for Western forces would become effective only if the Communists had honored for one year their declarations to guarantee us free access.

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General Hamlett and West Germans are not happy about limiting the number of Western forces, since they feel that this will give the Communists a golden opportunity to take upon themselves the judgment as to whether particular shipments of men, arms, and supplies are justified by the stipulated size of Western forces.

Other methods of reducing tensions proposed by the Working Group included (a) transferring administrative responsibility for refugees to a UN representative to assure that refugees are not exploited for intelligence and propaganda purposes in the Berlin area; and (b) agreement among the Four ^{powers} ~~powers~~ not to engage in inflammatory activities in East or West Berlin. So far, the West has not made these proposals at Geneva.

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What Next?

That then, is how the positions stand.

The question is, where do we go from here?

With each side having so far failed to get what it wants most from the other, will it now come forward with more modest proposals, or with new proposals?

It is fairly clear that Moscow has little trouble lowering its sights, since even its minimum demands require something from the West. And something is always better than nothing. Something is progress. And, moreover, something from the West cannot be had every day.

The conference would unquestionably be a success from the Soviet point of view if it produced nothing more than Western recognition of East German control of the autobahn and other routes.

The beauty of Khrushchev's position is that he thinks he can get his minimum demands even if the West fails to agree to anything at the conference. He always has the capability of taking the main action he has been talking about since November--turning over controls to the GDR. He has probably estimated that the West, in fact, would have to acknowledge this transfer of authority regardless of lack of agreement at Geneva or at the summit.

The situation is vastly different regarding Western objectives. If and when the West gives up the effort to obtain its phased plan for a united Berlin, German unification, and security measures, then it will no longer be basically asking for something from the Soviets, but will in essence be offering something to the Soviets.

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This is a difficult and dangerous thing to do. Moreover, there was no agreement among the four Western foreign ministers before the conference opened on what we should offer or when we should offer it. These questions may be decided quite agreeably, or they may cause much trouble within the Western camp.

The Western four-power Working Group in April suggested a series of proposals solely on Berlin which the West could try, one after the other, in the expected case that the Soviets were not agreeable to our over-all plan.

This series began with the same idea for Berlin that was incorporated into the phased plan, namely that of unifying East and West Berlin through free elections.

If the Soviets rejected this idea (which they have in no uncertain fashion), the series, very briefly, continued in this way:

The West would deal with the East Germans on access if the Soviets would make a detailed written agreement with us, designating the East Germans as their agents. The Soviets, and the East Germans independently, would guarantee our unrestricted access until Germany was unified, with Berlin the capital.

If the Soviets wouldn't accept this, then the West would offer to deal with the East Germans provided that the East Germans made a public statement guaranteeing our access rights, and provided that the Soviets associated themselves with this statement. A UN staff would monitor access to see that the agreements were being observed.

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In both these cases, we would make clear that we were not surrendering any of the legal bases for our presence in Berlin, and that we continued to hold the Soviet Union responsible for carrying out its obligations relating to us.

Finally, if the Soviets wouldn't agree to any of these suggestions, we would insist simply on continued free access, for which we would hold the Soviets responsible. The implication here is that we would not deal with the East Germans.

In their final meeting before Geneva, the Western foreign ministers did not choose to adopt any of the Working Group's reserve positions on Berlin. But it seems probable that if we present separate solutions, they will resemble those developed by the Working Group.

Allowance has to be made, however, for the possibility that the Western delegations will concoct new proposals right on the scene in Geneva.

It is still a question whether the West will table at Geneva any of the proposals which would concede exclusive East German control. It may be considered better tactics not to play these cards, since if we do, we may have nothing left to play at the summit.

Conclusion:

It seems quite plain that nothing in the way of a broad agreement will be concluded at Geneva, nor was anything like that to be expected.

The heart of the matter in Geneva, as indeed of the whole crisis in which Moscow and the West find themselves, is still Berlin, and most particularly our access to the city, and within that, the matter of whether and under what circumstances we will deal with the East Germans.

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The principal substantive question hanging over Geneva is whether the West wants to go into this subject now, postpone the discussion, or even decide that it is not a matter to be discussed.

The principal procedural question is whether to go on to a summit meeting, and if so, what to discuss there.

This is a point of potential difference between the Western powers, since the British have been straight out for the summit all along, while we have always made the summit conditional on progress at Geneva.

It has been fairly obvious that the President would not consider this condition fulfilled if the foreign ministers merely drew up a list of what they could not agree on.

Now, the President has said this week that the Soviets would have to concede our rights on Berlin before we would go to the summit.

If he means this, it would greatly alter the diplomatic situation, since he would in effect be asking the Soviets to grant a good part of what had been in dispute, and what had on fact brought on the present negotiations.

If the Soviets should consider agreeing to acknowledge our rights, they would presumably demand at the same time that we deal with the East Germans, and that would force us to a decision on this point.

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